

Johnston Karate Network - Selected Blog Posts

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Disclaimer – martial arts and exercise always carry a risk of injury, and it is the responsibility of the participant – not the author's – to insure that proper precautions are taken at all times. Safety and common safety are top priority.

Resources

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

For plenty of credible health information -

<http://www.webmd.com>

For plenty of training videos and tutorials, head over to my YouTube playlist blog -

<http://martialartsplaylist.blogspot.com>

Don't forget to check out the two lists of resources that I maintain -

<http://understandingkarate.com/2013/02/21/understanding-karate-do-supplementary-resources/>

<http://understandingkarate.com/2014/03/21/training-resource-posts/>

Combining body weight training with odd object training

You don't need a gym membership to get in great shape! Learn a few body-weight only movement techniques, develop confidence in them, and apply some creativity in your training progression. Look around you and see what you can use in your environment. If you've spent time learning ways to make body weight training harder by adjusting different variables – leverage, hand position, range of motion, etc. – you can find endless ways to do so with little to no cost.

Playground equipment at a public park.

Hanging from a hand towel that is doubled over your pullup bar.

Arrange a pair of tables or chairs such that you can perform dips or pushups from them.

The movement skills you can learn this way can translate to better movement in your martial arts training as well! Progressive calisthenics focus on not just building strength in your muscles, but also strength in movement. The benefits to coordination, confidence, flexibility, mobility, and joint health also help with martial arts, but also with life in general.

The article below has some nifty ideas that combine this kind of training – progressive calisthenics – with “odd object training”. Check it out!

<http://progressivecalisthenics.com/odd-object-training-with-bodyweight/>

For my writeup on “odd object training”, see the post below -

<http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/2013/02/free-pdf-book.html>

Yongchun White Crane Tutorial

<https://plus.google.com/102510418958375940310/posts/HdpoAuxv3Bb>

Posted by Martial Arts With Colman on Google+. We have been looking into the connection between White Crane and Okinawan Karate. He offers some observations and also links to the discussion on our Martial Arts Forums. Anyone can view the discussions, but you must have a Google+ account and become a member of the forums to participate.

Join the martial arts forums by visiting below and clicking on the “Ask to Join” button on the top right hand side, once you get there -

<https://plus.google.com/communities/114731250565870013102>

Synovial Fluid

[Article about Synovial Fluid](#)

The above link leads to an article on the Yoga Journal about synovial fluid and exercise. This is very helpful in understanding its benefits, what it really does, and so forth. The article also has tips on potential problems to look out for in practice and how to avoid or work around them. The goal, as always with Yoga, is long term joint integrity and overall health!

IronTamer Dave Whitley – The Art of Perfect Practice

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuvAOseCnrs>

“Mindfulness in your movement”; “Practice makes permanent”. Those are my two favorite quotes from this video, which was excerpted from Dave Whitley’s Lessons of the Old-Time Strongmen DVD. Treating strength as a skill – something that you have to practice – has been something that I’ve been fascinated with the past year. Training for quality in movement and coordinated, full body strength are definitely very important to us as martial artists. “The quest for the perfect rep” as he says in the video – instead of training to failure or sloppiness in form, train with a focus on quality in movement in every repetition.

Karate Styles, Connections, and Splits

Over at our Martial Arts Forums, we’ve talked a lot about the connections to be found between styles, as well as the history behind some of them. Many of us there are aware of how common it is for some high level students to branch out to form their own “ryu” after a split in philosophy or training ideas. Sometimes this is well founded, but many times not. I’m all for reconciling differences or discussing new ideas to see how they work within the “ryu”.

This isn’t something that necessarily happens within classical systems very often, as far as I am aware, though – but I could be wrong. Besides, each organization has a right to monitor the changes made to the official syllabus. I also think, however, that each dojo has a right to accommodate individual needs at least to some extent. It’s a balance.

Feel free to join the discussion over at our forums -

<https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/9boE9cAoomK>

Kata Bunkai Principles

I would like to pose this question as a way to start another useful discussion. How may we discover workable applications for kata based on principles, compared to what bunkai we have been taught already? Here is an excellent article I found that compares and contrasts the kata's of different styles, in the context of learning how to create variations from the core technique. Of course, thoroughly learning kata as it is taught is important, in order to absorb the principles of the style and internalize it. Once we have those principles, we can work from them naturally and the variations flow from there.

Comparative Kata - www.budotheory.ca/index.php/articles/29-resources/resvideo/60-comparative-kata-henka

Join the discussion over at Google+ - <https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/hEtMugbUtjh>

Making the Connections

<http://bamboospiritma.blogspot.ca/2013/11/making-connections.html>

Be sure to read the excellent article above, which talks about connecting ideas between styles.

Some of the greatest martial artists in history had one thing in common and that was the ability to "make the connections." Jigoro Kano connected the concepts of various jiu jitsu styles into Judo...

We have talked about making connections between the principles and concepts of different arts before over at the Martial Arts Forums. I remember when I first started taking up Aikido, I started seeing connections with bunkai for karate kata. Compare these applications to Aikido techniques -

One Minute Bunkai: Seisan #1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1C3zZQ4KtQ>

There was also a seminar in Florida I went to back in 2006, that was put on by JKF Wadokai. Their special guest instructors were the kaicho of Nakamura ha Shindo Yoshin ryu Jiu jitsu (one of the foundational styles of Wado ryu Karate) and an Aikido instructor. Learning the connections was amazing! The Jiu jitsu instructor taught similar concepts as to what was in that bunkai video above. Lots to think about!

Head on over to our discussion thread on Google+ if you want to join in -

Connections Discussion on Google+ - <https://plus.google.com/100833292794303697030/posts/K6PfnH753Vj>

Keeping True to the Traditions

The growth process that takes place when you push past your comfort zone is invaluable. As such, it is important that we do not water down our teachings and traditions. That way our students can also work through this growth process. Attaining a black belt is a sign of perseverance and a dedication to learning, not how much you paid for it! The etiquette is in place to discipline the mind.

Article page – Keeping true to the traditions of our martial arts -

<http://warriorspirithrd.blogspot.com/2013/11/keeping-true-to-traditions-of-our.html>

Also, feel free to check out our discussion thread on this article -

<https://plus.google.com/115631823683916857284/posts/fk49DwRSOT7>

The role of free sparring

Mr. Djurdjevic (<https://plus.google.com/+DanDjurdjevicplus>), a regular contributor at our Martial Arts Forums, put up a blog post that I thought would be very beneficial to my readers. I've heard the "my style's techniques are too deadly for me to allow sparring" argument too many times to ignore. Personally, I fall in line with the argument made by boxers – everyone has a plan until they get hit! That being said, it is indeed important to have a range of sparring drills and training methods to prepare yourself for contact sparring of any sort. Anyhow, check out the blog post for some well reasoned thoughts on the matter -

<http://dandjurdjevic.blogspot.com/2013/10/the-role-of-free-sparring.html>

Taekwondo vs Krav Maga

<http://retford-martial-arts.co.uk/martial-arts-mindset-part-2-tae-kwon-do-vs-krav-maga/>

This article was posted by a user on our Martial Arts Forums. If you would like to join the discussion on this topic, head over to the original thread -

Discussion thread on this article -

<https://plus.google.com/115274930663103930339/posts/4XxaTzshFh6>

Here is what Mr. Colman had to say on this topic, at the discussion thread -

"Nobody in their right martial art mind fights exactly like they perform in kata (forms). Kata are basically just drills to practice multiple techniques in combination with emphasis on timing, distancing, focus, etc. Kata can be viewed as a single person drill. Just like a boxer would do his shadow boxing but in a less involved way than kata. What the author missed is that TMA (traditional martial arts) also practice 2-man drills such kata bunkai (form application) or yakusoku kumite (preset fighting application) based on techniques from the kata which is no different to what you find in the author's Krav Maga. Forms have been around for hundreds if not thousands of years in TMA. In those days martial arts was used for the real stuff, i.e. to actually kill people, unlike today where we just practice hopefully for a real self-defense moment."

- Martial Arts with Colman

Visit his profile at: <https://plus.google.com/+MartialArtsWithColman>

The role of free sparring, continued

Here is my own response -

That last point, in addition to the necessary secrecy, is why forms were created in the first place. Actually practicing killing blows with a partner is neither practical nor ethical for obvious reasons. Also, as Colman mentioned there were and are prearranged sparring drills. These can be changed to adapt to students involved. Another point to keep in mind is that when a teacher formulated a kata, it was based on his fighting experience distilled into basic concepts, as well as a foundation of previous kata. Of course, the principles and intended applications would thusly be “encoded” in the form for the teacher’s direct students to learn and pass on. Unfortunately we don’t have full knowledge of the original intentions behind all historic forms. It is no wonder some people look at a form and don’t know what uses it has or how it correlates to “real” fighting. They do not know the context of the form within the original system.

All of that being said, I’m not getting into the debate about which style is (insert superlative or insult here)

That’s just silly and pointless. It really boils down to two simple things, in my mind. 1. Pick a martial art based on availability, accessibility, personal tastes and goals, as well as the objectively measurable quality and professionalism of the school. 2. Stick to it. This should go without saying. However, most people miss the fact that really applying yourself to an art will give you a much deeper proficiency and a more practical use of it than if you just went through the motions. Traditional TKD has a surprisingly wide array of techniques, fighting ranges, and drills. Any dedicated student who sticks with it through black belt and supplements with a grappling art will have a very well rounded fighting style.

That being said, of course Krav Maga is certainly not lacking in realism or techniques. Again, I’m not arguing for better or worse styles. 😊

Karate History

I am sure that at least a few of my readers are familiar with the history of karate and its development. I just thought I would share a bit of information for those less familiar. The change in the kanji for karate was philosophical in nature – “kara” meaning “void” or “empty”, taking on Zen-like meanings, in addition to the obvious martial applications. Of course, weapon skills in kobudo are a natural extension, for the most part, of the empty hand skills in karate. (Although this is something I am still learning more about, to be honest!) The change in the kanji was also a way to make karate more acceptable to the Japanese public at the time that it was being spread to the mainland, as the original meaning of karate was “Chinese hand”. In a way this was a political move and it did cause some recoil in Okinawa. I personally have no opinions on this, since I need to learn more about the history of each country involved.

Nonetheless, I do enjoy learning about the connections between the martial ways of China and Okinawa. We have looked into this type of subject before, such as the connection between Fujian White Crane and karate. It is definitely a fascinating study! Anyway, check out the link below for details on the origins of the kanji for karate -

Karate history and the origins of the kanji for karate – DownloadKarate:

<http://www.downloadkarate.com/karate-articles/karate-history>

Karate History, continued

In case you are interested in our previous discussion about the connection between White Crane and Karate, visit the related thread at our Martial Arts Forums -

Yong Chun White Crane and Karate - <https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/ZECCKRGAhY>
Mr. Colman, one of our moderators, provided a link to an English caption and talkover version of the video -

<http://youtu.be/o-OTHCGNs7o>

Stay strong – keep looking forward!

Remember that obstacles are what you see when you lose sight of your goal. The valley you find yourself in before the climb back up is not a trial. It is a lesson – a blessing, even – that you recognize when you take account of the wisdom and friends you’ve gained along the way. And when you start climbing that next mountain, you may find it a joy, a wonder, and a test of the strength and love you KNOW that you already have. When you make it to the top of that mountain and see your whole world – rejoice knowing how far you’ve come and how far there is to go.

There is no tomorrow!

What are you doing today on your own to improve your health or fitness? It all starts in the mind. You can’t just lift a few weights and get fit! You have to be motivated, dedicated, and consistent, as well as work hard and keep making progress. Keep pushing forward. It doesn’t have to feel like a sport or a competition. Just set a few specific, measurable, results oriented goals and plan your workouts accordingly! Get rid of all the distractions that get in the way of your workouts. Get into a routine!

Exercise needs to be a habit and fitness is a lifestyle! There is no other way and there are no excuses. THERE IS NO TOMORROW! We only have today!!! Think you don’t have time to train? Drop “going out” as often and do something for your health instead! Make it a family affair if needed. If you can’t, then make a time and place all your own to train. Allow no distractions, whether from Facebook, your phone, your family, your dog, or your cat. OWN YOUR BODY, MIND, AND TRAINING. We aren’t in control of a lot of things in life, but you CAN control every single rep. Live it. Love it. Get that work in!

When you find the extra energy that comes from training, the improved focus and health, the confidence from improved strength and technique – you’ll be glad you set the time aside!

[#fitness #strengthtraining #strengthandconditioning](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1BFZEH3SbQ>

Warrior Mentality

We have talked about the mind-body connection before. We have to sharpen all of our weapons...just as a samurai would sharpen his sword, we too must sharpen our bodies through training. The mind is also sharpened and cleaned through this process, as science has shown! Thanks to Colman for bringing up such research – definitely brings a clearer understanding of the benefits of training.

We have to have a warrior's mentality to forge a path ahead in life – not just in the dojo! The perseverance and indomitable spirit we learn in the dojo are invaluable. Life is never easy, I think, when we are trying to make a life for ourselves and overcoming the obstacles we face.

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” – Henry Ford

“Studying the martial Way is like climbing a cliff: keep going forward without rest. Resting is not permissible because it causes recessions to old adages of achievement. Persevering day in, day out improves techniques, but resting one day causes lapses. This must be prevented.”

~Mas Oyama~

Check out this article -

A Warrior's Mentality

<http://clearbrookwrestling.com/teams/default.asp?u=CLEARBROOKWRESTLING&t=c&s=htosports&p=custom&pagename=A+Warrior%27s+Mentality>

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

“Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) combines cognitive and behavioral therapy, incorporating methodologies from various practices including Eastern mindfulness techniques.”

We can't ignore the mind-body connection in our martial arts practice. The Eastern disciplines have a tendency to be very holistic, and Asian martial arts are no exception. My psychiatrist introduced me to DBT skills this morning and I immediately recognized the concept of mindfulness.

DBT Skills List

http://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/dbt_skills_list.html

More on next page

Eating for strength!

After a hard workout or martial arts practice, it's important to put quality food into your system to help you recover! The important thing to remember is to maximize the nutrient to calorie ratio as much as possible. Secondly, prepare nutritious meals that taste good to you. A good, satisfying meal after a hard session promotes good health. Just remember to take moderate portions, and to take time to really savor the meal. This will help to prevent over-eating. Besides, having leftovers is usually a good thing!

Below is an affordable recipe that serves 12. I'm not saying this kind of recipe is best, though! It is simply an idea for a high quality, high protein meal at a low cost per serving. Remember to both train AND eat for quality results!

<http://americanfood.about.com/od/classicchowdersandstews/r/beefstew.htm>

Here is a page with recipes for vegetarian soups and stews as well -

<http://www.cookinglight.com/food/vegetarian/vegetarian-soups-stews-00412000072092/>

Vegetables make great sources of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals!

More on the next page

My thoughts on dietary supplements

The dietary supplements industry is a huge one – with total sales in the U.S. coming in at \$22.1 billion back in 2006. While the FDA no longer regulates dietary supplements the way it does with foods, it does ensure the following things:

Are produced in a quality manner
Do not contain contaminants or impurities
Are accurately labeled

That being said, we have to keep in mind that commonly in America there is a tendency to over-diagnose and over-medicate. This is not directly related to supplements, but the culture of having a pill for (almost) everything can seem to carry over to dieting and exercise as well.

However, like prescribed medications, supplements can have unintended side effects, especially if taken in a heavier dose than what is recommended. Also, not all supplements contain what is advertised or work as advertised. Now, I am not going to suggest that I eschew supplements altogether. What I do want to suggest, however, as a fitness educator, is that it is important to know your body, what works for you and your lifestyle, and to do research into different supplements that you feel may be of benefit.

Also, I take the view of many conservative chiropractors, in that surgery and medication should be avoided if possible. Of course, each person's situation is different and many different factors need to be weighed. Sometimes supplements are very beneficial to obtaining optimal health. Modern medicine has indeed saved many lives! All in all, I recommend a balanced approach.

Be sure to also check out this great article on supplements, from a trusted source.

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/truth-behind-top-10-dietary-supplements>

More on next page

First Aid Emergency Drills

Those of us who are teachers are responsible, in some way or another, for the success that our juniors enjoy. We provide safe atmospheres for them to grow and develop not just as martial artists, but human beings. I am sure that all of us are used to dealing with the risks and pitfalls that come with training – injuries, bruises, having a bad day, and such. We know what it's like when first starting out, advancing, hitting plateaus, working through injuries...gaining a lot of “body wisdom” and life wisdom as well. We learn the importance of safety in each form of training. For that reason, I highly recommend that each and every martial arts instructor get certified in CPR/First Aid and help everyone learn basic health and safety. Below is a useful resource for helping learn First Aid Emergency Drills on the Red Cross website.

<http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/first-aid-emergency-drills>

The Mechanism of Stress

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-5TT33YEPg>

“Amir Mourad talks about the mechanism of stress and explains that the human system is conditioned by experience.”

Definitely an illuminating talk on reorganizing our “human system” in such a way that we can deal with stress and achieve clarity of perception. Stress is indeed called a major health epidemic in recent years, but it is also impossible to be stress free. Let us learn to push through and persevere, and not let our emotions control us – yet also remember to not deny our emotions, which are part of being human. Let us take out the time to introspect, reorganize your thought habits, and learn how to not simply cope with stress, but come from a place of calm strength – “the eye of the storm”. As the teacher says in the video, “self knowledge means to inquire into the self.”

Bare Knuckle Boxing: Old School Power Movements

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3LcgqDlqG4>

From the video's description -

"The Fall Step, The Shoulder Whirl, The Upward Surge. The Spring Step; the more of these we can successfully integrate into our punching techniques the more natural power we will have available to punish our opponents with."

The training in this video is definitely very helpful in training for bare knuckle punching power, which is useful for street self defense. The types of punching demonstrated are generally not very common in "modern" sport boxing, but that does not mean they are not effective! The pugilists around a century ago, especially fighters such as Jack Dempsey, understood the secrets of powerful punching. Dempsey's book *Championship Fighting* actually details the body mechanics behind the falling step, shoulder whirl, and upward surge (as used in shovel hooks, especially). For a comparison of old school boxing versus new school, check out the below article -

<http://ringtalk.com/boxing-professor-marbry-boxing-old-school-vs-new-schoollogged-toilets>

Boxing for street self defense

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSXoPCQXiO4>

Definitely a very technical style of defense. I say that because it does take a great degree of timing and reflexes, knowing just how much to slip, where to step or pivot as you do do, and so forth. If you look at old Mike Tyson videos, from back in his prime, you'll see that he had AMAZING defensive skills, including his bob and weave. People are always surprised to learn how technical boxing is. Also, Floyd Mayweather Jr. has often been said to have the best, most technical defense in boxing. He uses kind of a "Philly shell" that utilizes head movement and shoulder rotations.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCHCjIVOSCw>

This video is also very useful. It is excerpted from the *Extreme Boxing: Hardcore Boxing for Self Defense*, which is available on the Paladin Press website. The video details bare knuckle boxing techniques and "dirty boxing" from before the Marquis of Queensberry rules for boxing. What a lot of people forget is that old time fisticuffs had a lot more techniques, including elbows, forearm strikes, foot stomps, and headbutts. The full DVD explains how to deal with grapplers and kickboxers, as well as covers many other aspects of old school boxing.

Classical Japanese martial arts discussion

I've long wished for the opportunity to train in some more classical systems, especially Bujinkan. Certainly, there's so much "mystery" surrounding it, and whole lot of "myth", but the Bujinkan group certainly seems to teach a very practical system. I also have a friend who has studied ninjutsu for some time and we have traded ideas on budo. I think a lot of him as a budoka and have no doubt that his training is very practical. Anyway – this is an interesting video and I'd like to discuss – bojutsu of any kind is a fascination of mine! If you would like to join in on the discussion of these topics, please head on over to the related thread on the Martial Arts Forums - <https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/Rp5uysnPB32>

If you are not already a member of the forums, visit below and click on the "Ask to Join" button on the top right hand side - <https://plus.google.com/communities/114731250565870013102>

Benefits of squatting

<http://breakingmuscle.com/strength-conditioning/a-look-at-how-squatting-affects-the-knee>

From looking at the benefits of squatting in the above article, it's no wonder that many martial arts styles practice squats and stance work. Not only do these help protect the knees but also help with the kind of abilities needed for martial arts. On that note, a lot of physical therapists get their clients to practice "invisible chair" while squeezing a ball between their knees. It's an excellent rehabilitative exercise. Pretty much every athletic activity we engage in, and even many "real life activities" such as moving furniture, involve the hands and feet in some way. It's no mystery that having strong, well trained joints, ligaments, and tendons helps in a virtually endless number of activities!

Thankfulness and learning

Yeah, so, I'm actually a lot more thankful than I sound most of the time. God has really been working on my heart as of late. Times are changing, that is for sure, and in this transitional phase – I've been praying to God a lot more. I've learned to be more thankful for all the things I do have, and even the hard times and dark times that have taught me so much. There is a light at the end of every tunnel, and we need to go through that journey for the learning process we go through. Sometimes we find an answer that we really needed, and didn't realize there was even a question in the first place. It's like the proverb that Bruce Lee stated once – A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer.

And by the way – how about that moment when you realize that all of the crap you've been going through actually had a point? "Come back tomorrow."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-qesAt92Jw>

The Inner Art of Karate – book mini-review

I recently purchased a copy of this book and have been slowly working my way through it. It primarily deals with the deeper concepts of Budo and of course, Karate. Ma-ai, rhythm and cadence, “yomi”, and so forth. I appreciate the author’s focus on Karate as a method of civilian self defense as contrasted to the sports mentality seen so commonly now. There are quotes from Munenori and Musashi sprinkled throughout, with commentary on them – I have found these quite enlightening as well. Overall a great read.

<http://uechi-ryu.com/the-inner-art-of-karate/>

Muscle Building Workouts

Even while we plan on ways to plan our diet and meet weight loss goals, why not also bring up different ways to still enjoy our food at the same time? It’s important to know our bodies and how they react to what we put in them. You don’t have to be miserable while losing weight! The below article strips the Renegade lifestyle down to basics. Take what works for you and apply it!

50 Renegade Nutrition Rules:

<http://jasonferruggia.com/50-renegade-nutrition-rules/>

Fad diets

It’s important to understand the ins and outs of any nutritional program that you think would be beneficial. Many of the fad diets out there have certain health risks attached. Always look into scientific research or authority websites, such as WebMD – which fortunately puts things into plain language. For example, the Atkins diet can be and has been used successfully, but it’s important to understand how to apply the principles to your lifestyle. The same goes for other popular diets. Just remember that you can’t stick to a low carb / high protein diet forever – it is generally going to be unhealthy to do so – especially if you are a fitness enthusiast! And let’s remember that both proper nutrition and exercise are needed for total health. Here is some information -

Low-Carb, High-Protein Diets: Risks (Ketosis) and Benefits:

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/high-protein-low-carbohydrate-diets>

We have a discussion thread on this subject over at our Martial Arts Forums. Head on over to check it out or even join in -

<https://plus.google.com/+OwenJohnstonKarate/posts/TjNmzYbKgoj>

Fitness and Nutrition Links

Eat like a warrior king

http://www.t-nation.com/free_online_article/most_recent/eat_like_a_warrior_king_1

10 Muscle Building Habits

<http://www.scrawnytobrawny.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/10-Muscle-Building-Habits.pdf>

Protein Supplement Myth Revealed by Body of Work

<http://www.livescience.com/8086-protein-supplement-myth-revealed-body-work.html>

If you can't pick it, grow it, or kill it, you shouldn't put it in your belly! A natural and well balanced diet has plenty of protein as well as vitamins and minerals.

Multivitamins 'waste of money,' say medical experts

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/270345.php>

Believing in you and believing in your training

<http://barscience.me/2013/12/19/believing-in-you-and-believing-in-your-training/>

Is Training to Failure Really Necessary for Muscle Growth?

<http://relentlessgains.com/training-to-failure-really-necessary-for-muscle-growth/>

Throw away your digestive enzyme supplements

<http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/09/throw-away-your-digestive-enzyme-supplements/>

Daily dose: potassium

<http://www.doctoroz.com/videos/daily-dose-potassium>

The Saxon Trio: What they ate and how they trained

<http://www.bobwhelan.com/history/saxontrio.html>

Conditioning Tips Drills and Exercises. Find sport specific conditioning for gymnastics. Will help in all sports

<http://www.drillsandskills.com/skills/cond>

Survival: A Manual That Could Save Your Life

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0873645065/>

The starvation mode myth debunked

<http://www.glutenfreepost.com/starvation-mode-myth-in-the-venus-factor/>

Fitness and Nutrition Links, continued

Bodybuilding.com – The Expendables Workout! Watch The Movie. Get The Body.

<http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/expendables.htm>

How to build muscle on a plant-based or vegan diet

<http://www.scrawnytobrawny.com/plant-muscle>

Is it Paleo?

<http://blaneyperformance.wordpress.com/2013/01/30/is-it-paleo/>

The Best and Safest Way to Treat Neck Pain, Strains, and Stiffness

<http://breakingmuscle.com/health-medicine/the-best-and-safest-way-to-treat-neck-pain-strains-and-stiffness>

The Counterintuitive Effects of Saturated Fats & Cholesterol on Cardiovascular Disease

<http://www.nutrition.org/asn-blog/2013/12/the-counterintuitive-effects-of-saturated-fats-cholesterol-on-cardiovascular-disease/>

Working through Injury

Strength in the Face of Injury: 5 Lessons Learned

<http://breakingmuscle.com/mobility-recovery/strength-in-the-face-of-injury-5-lessons-learned>

These 5 lessons are great! The 1st lesson to learn, though, in my opinion, is to respect your body – know your limits so that you don't train to injury. But I think lesson 2 in the article is probably the most important! You have to work around the injury – but what this forces you to do is learn new things about yourself and new things about training.

We have had an excellent discussion so far on this topic. Head on over to the forums to join in -

<https://plus.google.com/102510418958375940310/posts/FKVshsuCENH>

Hiking for health

I love taking solitary hikes to “declutter” the mind and recharge emotionally. Obviously, it's also healthy for the body! It can promote bone health and help lower the risk of heart disease. I also find that I can get a decent cardio workout if I go on a long hike on a difficult to navigate trail while keeping up a brisk “power walking” pace. Hiking up hills especially is a good workout for the legs! Sometimes while on a hike out in the woods, I'll climb a tree over jump over natural obstacles for the muscular benefits.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwuI6hVVXew>

Train like Bruce Lee

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Bodybuilding.com – Enter The Six-Pack: Train Like Bruce Lee

<http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/getting-fit-and-strong-the-bruce-lee-way.htm>

40 years ago, young athletes found inspiration in Bruce Lee's peerless intensity and wiry strength. Not much has changed since. Get out the heavy bag and make Lee's training style work for you!

This is SUCH a great resource! I'll share it with my students and perhaps make some printouts of it. Bruce was definitely ahead of his time when it came to strength training and proper nutrition for martial arts. He was one of the inspirations for me to start thoroughly researching as much as I could about the martial arts, nutrition, and strength – and I know it's the same for many practitioners.

There is a lot I like about the training programs listed.

Variety of exercises, equipment, routines, and rep / set schemes. This can prevent training boredom.

Built-in progression principles. 1 to 5 sets of failure has a lot of room for progression. You can also build up from the shorter routines up to Bruce Lee's routines. You can always "go beyond" one of the body weight exercises listed by adding weight; etc.

Balance – every side of the body is trained. No body part is ignored. As we know, muscular imbalances are unhealthy and can limit strength gains, as well as lead to bad posture and injury. Proper muscular balance and overall symmetry, however, are very beneficial to health and athletics.

Functionality – for one, no training modality was ignored in Bruce's quest for functional athletic prowess, and all of these exercises are among those he stuck with. One major principle of his workouts was using compound exercises, meaning that they involve multiple joints or muscles. The compound movements he used train the body in ways that the body was meant to be used, instead of the unnatural, potentially injurious movements used by many serious weightlifters. The squat works practically the entire body and promote an anabolic environment in the body, as well. Squats also help you run faster and jump higher – meaning that squats are very functional for athletes! Other compound exercises such as pullups, pushups, bridging, and many kettlebell exercises have similar benefits.

Another pair of good resources that are relevant to the above resource -

Squats: 8 reasons to do this misunderstood exercise

<http://fitness.mercola.com/sites/fitness/archive/2012/05/25/darin-steen-demonstrates-the-perfect-squat.aspx>

Benefits of compound exercises/workouts revealed.

<http://www.getlifetips.com/2013/05/Benefits-of-compund-exercises-workouts-revealed.html>

Recent workouts

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

I'll list some of my recent workouts here as inspiration for others.

January 7th, 2014 – Tuesday

Tuesday's first workout goals -

Warm up -

3 two minute rounds of skipping rope with one minute stretch breaks inbetween

150% of the Century Test while wearing 20 pound weight vest

The test is 100 total repetitions. Doing 150 total reps with perfect form is a good indicator of readiness for the test at the calisthenics workshop. The test is 40 squats, 30 pushups (kneeling pushups for women), 20 hanging knee raises, and 10 pullups (Australian pullups aka inverted rows or horizontal pullups, for women). So, 150% would be 60 squats, 45 pushups (kneeling for women), 30 hanging knee raises, and 15 pullups (horizontal for women).

Al Kavadlo on The Century – PCC Blog

<http://pccblogger.dragondoor.com/al-kavadlo-century/>

Actual results -

I completed two rounds of skipping rope and felt pretty warmed up. I'll do the third one later.

Squats – legs started burning at 50, but I squeezed out the last ten a little slower, and still with good form.

Minute break.

Pushups – arms were burning at 35 slow pushups, took a few short breaths, did another 5, took another few breaths, and slowly squeezed out the last 5 with good form. Some work left to do, but I felt good.

Stretched and breathed for a few minutes.

Hanging leg raises – my hip flexors and abs were burning at 21, but got to 25 slow ones, then dropped carefully from the bar for a few breaths, then squeezed out the last 5. Need more work here, but feeling good.

Stretch break.

Pullups – felt good on the first 7, slightly cheated on 3 more. Dropped carefully and shook my arms out for a few seconds. Felt good for another 3 then had to cheat on the last two. Couldn't quite get my chin over the bar on the last two on each set. So, I have a lot of work to do here, but I feel good considering I was wearing a weight vest.

I ate a pouch of wild caught tuna, drank an energy shot, and some water, then rested a bit. After resting...

(continued on next page)

Recent workouts, page 2

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Tuesday's second workout, results -

Combination of calisthenics and sandbag training

1×10 close underhand grip pullups

1×15 horizontal pullups using dip station

5×Farmer's walk with 45 pound sandbag in each hand – length of 100 feet and back

2×10 45 pound sandbag swings with one hand, and repeated with other hand

1×20 flat straight leg raises

2×Sandbag carry for 100 feet and back – 90lbs of sand in a travel case carried on forearms (palms up and elbows bent at 90 degrees to work the biceps as a “static hold”)

1×20 flat straight leg raises

1×30 glute bridges

1×6 sumo squat upright row with 90lbs of sand

1×20 wrestler's bridge

1×15 sumo squat upright row with 45lbs of sand

1×10 deadlift of 135 pounds of sand

1x duck walk a length of 100 feet and back while wearing 20lb vest

1×20 wrestler's bridge

January 8th, 2014 – Wednesday

Karate kata practice and striking the makiwara for warmups

First portion of the workout:

Wearing 20lb weight vest for the following:

1×10, horizontal pullups on dip station

1×7, false grip pullups on gymnastics rings

2×20, knuckle pushups

1×7, false grip pullups on gymnastics rings

1×20, dips on dip station

1×7, false grip pullups on gymnastics rings

1×20, dips on dip station (at 45 degree angle to focus on pectorals)

Rest break

(continued on next page)

Recent workouts, page 3

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Second portion of the workout:

Specialization exercises -

50 seconds, hang grip from pullup bar, rock climber grip

10 repetitions each of eagle claw , wrist rotations, and wrist stretches (to loosen up the muscles and shake out waste buildup)

10 repetitions each of wrist pushups and fingertip pushups (both done on knees)

10 eagle claws, wrist rotations, and wrist stretches

30 seconds, hang grip from pullup bar, with one hand on bar and the other hand tightly holding a folded towel doubled over the bar (switched the towel to the other side after the first 30 seconds, and repeated the hang with the other hand on the towel)

10 eagle claws, wrist rotations, and wrist stretches

10 repetitions each of wrist pushups and fingertip pushups (both done on knees)

1 minute per hand, rice bucket exercises for fingers and wrists

Finisher – wrist roller:

3x, all the way up and down, overhand grip, with 17.5 pounds

3x, all the way up and down, underhand grip, with 27.5 pounds

Eagle claw – one repetition = start with the thumb and fingers fully extended, then clinch the fist tight

Working with new students

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

One of our regular contributors over at the Martial Arts Forums had this to say recently.

Hi everyone!

Sometimes, it feels like you're not making progress if you end up spending a lot of time working with the newbies, doesn't it?

I think you're still making progress – very, very important progress.

She linked to a blog post of hers where she talks about becoming a white belt again in an art unfamiliar to her, as well as working with new students and having to think about exactly how to explain the techniques. Teaching is itself an art form! I appreciate the fresh perspective on becoming a white belt all over again and keeping an eye on technique. And I can relate – I have gone over the kihon kata's and Pin an kata's with students 1000s of times. Compared to solo practice, teaching does make you think about little details – so all those repetitions have helped me tweak my own technique quite a bit!

Her blog post – The Joy of Newbies

<http://thestickchick23.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-joy-of-newbies.html>

If you would like to join in on the discussion, head on over to the thread we have going at the forums -

<https://plus.google.com/106259765746882393044/posts/KP6keEo3bv7>

Over coaching in martial arts

Blog post by Bamboo Spirit Martial Arts Centre – Over Coaching

<http://bamboospiritma.blogspot.com/2014/01/over-coaching.html>

In this post, I explore the issue of “over coaching.” Have any of you experienced this?

I certainly have, and I wonder how common it is in martial arts instruction? Personally, I had to learn how to strike a balance between correcting techniques, and simply observing the movements. Occasionally I will watch a student's performance of a kata all the way through, ask him or her to repeat a certain sequence, and then provide correction on it. Usually, when I see a student struggling with a particular transition or sequence, I'll help them drill that as a separate movement. So, I do appreciate Bamboo Spirit's blog post for keeping some important points in mind and getting teachers to think about their own habits. If you'd like to join in on the discussion about this topic, head on over -

<https://plus.google.com/100833292794303697030/posts/TC5P2dnR3Ro>

Karate Principles discussion

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Responses to “karate ni sente nashi” – a blog post by Dan Djurdjevic, instructor at the Academy of Traditional Fighting Arts. He is a regular contributor at the Martial Arts Forums and has decades of experience.

<http://dandjurdjevic.blogspot.com/2014/01/responses-to-karate-ni-sente-nashi.html>

I've had two main “contrary” responses to my “Karate ni sente nashi?” article:

1. *“That’s all very interesting, but I prefer this article...” (which goes on to detail exactly why and how karate is compatible with pre-emptive striking).*
2. *“I don’t have time for your theories – I hit first and hard and that works for me.”*
I thought I’d address both of these as succinctly as I can.

Original Karate ni sente nashi article -

<http://dandjurdjevic.blogspot.com.au/2014/01/karate-ni-sente-nashi.html>

We have had a good discussion about the issues raised in this article, over at the forums. Head on over if you would like to join in -

<https://plus.google.com/111194665625533358044/posts/Ftxn7aWQyi>

Perseverance in practice

Bamboo Spirit Martial Arts Centre: Keep On Practicing!

<http://bamboospiritma.blogspot.ca/2014/01/keep-on-practicing.html>

In this blog entry, I talk about incremental improvement and how it can add up over time.

When I first began martial arts, I couldn’t understand how my instructors were always better by just inches. But that’s right – incremental progress! It is like the law of diminishing returns...Yet, as we get older, we have to learn how to conserve energy, especially against younger students. With age comes certain perks, such as proficiency in strength and technique – younger men with their high metabolisms and lack of experience will not have hit their peak yet in terms of building their athletic prowess or martial skill. Older martial arts athletes (ages 35 and over – I am 36 now) with a lot of experience and “trial and error”, as well as a slower metabolism, have accrued the athletic strength and fighting experience to know how to deal with younger, faster opponents. Indeed – consistency!

If you want to join in on the discussion, head on over -

<https://plus.google.com/100833292794303697030/posts/Yy9CxuJNRYr>

Kata Comparison among Styles

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjddaBWugLs>

Higaonna-sensei performing Seisan. I see similarities to Wansu and Annan. I know the JKF Wadokai version of the kata (as Ohtsuka-sensei performed it). In comparing the two, the first “back side” pattern (with palm blocks etc starting at around 30 seconds) gives me some ideas on how the related Wadokai pattern could be used. My understanding that one potential bunkai for the Wadokai version of the pattern is to break a grip, lift the opponent’s arm, pull it back, and strike to the body.

To join in on the discussion of this topic, head on over -

<https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/2PNkTK1NHF8>

Nakazato Shūgorō 仲里 周五郎 – Chinto kata

Below is a video of a great performance of the kata Chinto. I was learning the Wado ryu version of the kata at one point. This one isn’t very different as far as I can tell.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZurwyyPUBM>

Making sense of Passai

Article - Making Sense of Passai (An Exploration of Origin and Style)

<http://www.ikigaiway.com/2014/making-sense-of-passai-an-exploration-of-origin-and-style/>

This is a great article on the “Bassai” family of kata. I’ve seen many versions of Bassai and know one that is similar to Bassai as practiced Wado ryu but with obvious Shotokan influences. I can certainly see why it is “like fighting at night” – light body movements and many hip twists rather than a lot of blocking motions. I think it’s a mistake to say that there are lots of blocks in Bassai. As stated in the article – there is grappling in there. Some of the techniques that some might see as blocks may be used as elbow, hammerfist, or backhand strikes.

Adaptability in martial arts

We have been discussing the topic of flexibility in martial arts over at the Martial Arts Forums. One of our regular posters wrote an article about the subject, which you can find here -

The Need for Flexibility in Martial Arts

<http://thestickchick23.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-need-for-flexibility-in-martial-arts.html>

My sensei also taught us about adapting in our “bunkai” and how to “feel” it out with partners. I have to agree with other posters in the discussion – it simply can’t be learned from books or videos alone, no matter how useful they are. It takes a lot of feedback from partners, and expert instruction, to drill and internalize the principles behind the arts we learn.

Adaptability in martial arts, continued

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

I love it how the article author's teacher is open minded and is willing to consider new wrinkles on old techniques, etc. Mastery is always elusive, but chasing after it is always beneficial!

Feel free to join in on the discussion here -

<https://plus.google.com/106259765746882393044/posts/E58PeHncT24>

Old School Karate Techniques

Over at the Martial Arts Forums, we have been discussing the uses of old school karate techniques and tactics in mixed martial arts. Lyoto Machida is a great example of these. The animated gif below does shows the effectiveness of karate style stances in a different context. He dodged and intercepted the attack with a counter of his own. It is a good example of weaving defense and attack together in an efficient manner, and I can see the karate influence.

View the animated gif below -

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/lyoto_machida_vs-gegard_mousasi_8.gif?w=640

Credit to Dan Djurdjevic for providing the gif. Visit his Google+ profile below -

<https://plus.google.com/111194665625533358044>

To read an article about this subject, check it out below -

Lyoto Machida: Old School Karate

<http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1960174-lyoto-machida-old-school-karate>

If you would like to join in on the conversation, head on over to the discussion thread -

<https://plus.google.com/106527935338901270006/posts/MFkQB7tzBoy>

Climb that mountain!

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

What mountain is in front of you? Does it seem to be an impossible climb? Keep pushing forward. Be persistent. It will be a battle – no doubt about it. There will be days that you feel like giving up...where it seems like all you can do is break down and cry. That's perfectly human. Just don't give up – if you're already going through pain, get a reward for it! You are stronger than you imagine. Fighting spirit!!!

“Now you're gonna have to go through hell. Worse than any nightmare that you ever dreamed. But in the end, I know you'll be the one standing. You know what you gotta do. Do it. Do it.”

Rocky IV Great motivational speech between Rocky and Duke -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLI_rnUxL7I

Greek Pugilism

Western sport boxing as we know it today is based on bare knuckle boxing, which has its roots in the pugilism of ancient Greece and Rome. Boxing and wrestling were integral parts of a young man's education in old Greece. This video demonstrates a reconstruction of Greek pugilism. Looking at the roots of bare knuckle boxing and wrestling can teach us a lot about self defense! Pankration, the fighting art of Greece, was formed from a combination of boxing and wrestling.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47jmOxzux-8>

Post Training Liniment

Post-Workout Muscle Rub

What follows is my modified recipe for a rubbing preparation to help relieve muscular aches and pains associated with athletic sports. The recipe is based on the one recommended in Jack Dempsey's Championship Fighting.

3 ounces of Walgreens brand rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol) with wintergreen and glycerin. Comes in 16 oz bottles.

3 ounces witch hazel (natural astringent). Usually found on the same aisle as the alcohol. Walgreens sells T.N. Dickinson's brand of Witch Hazel. Comes in 16 oz bottles.

1 ounce olive oil (in the cooking section)

Notes

We used a measuring cup to measure the correct amount of fluid before pouring it into the mason jar pictured below. First, 3 ounces of alcohol was poured in, then 3 ounces of witch hazel, and 1 ounce of olive oil. We repeated this until there was a little over an ounce left of the alcohol and an ounce of the witch hazel. We then poured those into the jar, and measured out about 3/4ths of an ounce of olive oil to pour into the jar.

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/12-1.jpg?w=300&h=225>

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/12-2.jpg?w=300&h=224>

The Four Pillars of Strength

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Article - The Four Pillars of Strength – the RKC School of Strength

<http://rkcblog.dragondoor.com/four-pillars-strength/>

Grip training is both very neglected and very misunderstood in the fitness industry. The fact remains that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link – and this is usually the hands in the case of most gym rats. Proper training for the forearms results in a stronger grip. Thick bar training, kettlebells, wrist rollers, towel work (hang grip training and towel pull ups), and awkward object lifting (sandbags, sledgehammers, etc) are the most effective grip training tools that I'm aware of. They also build fearsome upper body strength in general. Some people swear by grippers as well, but those can get kind of pricey. I much prefer the uses of a hand towel looped over my pull up bar. I have a ton of pullup variations using towels, as well as various "hang grip" exercises – I will gladly write up a blog post about this if there is enough interest. Leave a comment below or head over to the discussion thread on Google+.

<https://plus.google.com/103841618685642891321/posts/V7iSRnchU7r>

For a few variations, check out this video by another guy -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBNjZK7A9gk>

Learning from Injury

Certainly we want to avoid injuries in training, but it's important to learn from them when they do happen. Pain and bruises and muscle soreness from training are inevitable. Yet, we train to become smarter about life and to know how to avoid injury. Unfortunately, there will be young people who will use any excuse to run headlong into potentially injurious training methods. If pain teaches us anything, though, it is what the author points out in the beginning of the below article. Be smart about what you do and don't be unnecessarily hard on your body. You only get one life. I'll admit that I'm a klutz by nature, since I have inferior "Se" (in MBTI terms). So I've had my share of spills especially when learning how to roll and tumble. But, it has definitely taught me the value of safe training!

<http://www.senseiando.com/pain-injuries-are-good-for-you>

Makiwara Board – car tire project

We added a second modification to a makiwara board. Old car tire – 14 and 3/4 inches. We had a few lengths of old cable wire from when Time Warner Cable replaced the cable that went from our light pole to house, because of the recent icy weather. We used a good bit of wire to cinch up the makiwara to the tire. A final bit of wire was used for a hanger. We used a pair of rat nose pliers to twist the wire, and a wire cutter. The previous modification we made was gluing on a layer of dense foam on the back as a cushion.

Located at +Johnston Karate

<https://plus.google.com/117769930869918189235>

For more about this kind of training, visit -

<http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/2013/02/our-training-equipment-pictures.html>

Pictures of the process we used in setting up the makiwara board -

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140221_173159_453.jpg?w=640&h=360

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140221_174554_430.jpg?w=640&h=1137

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140221_175025_475.jpg?w=640&h=1137

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140221_175640_182.jpg?w=640&h=1137

http://understandingkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140221_175303_612.jpg?w=640&h=1137

Fighting a southpaw

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqZ57fHSAHo>

As a southpaw with boxing experience, I would LOVE it if an orthodox fighter stepped in like that for a power shot. (See 2:28.) A southpaw can easily neutralize the jabbing hand of an orthodox boxer, more easily land a right hook, and stay on the outside of a right straight. Honestly, the first tip should have been getting past the right hand. Most orthodox fighters are just not used to the right hand being closer or being the jabbing hand. Also, for the guy to get in close with his right hand, he has to step in – all I would have to do is jab to stop him, especially with a “squared up” position like in the first tip demonstrated. If you can’t reach with your jab, you have no business trying to hit with your cross! Also, this assumes that the southpaw won’t be moving either.

Nutrition Myths Busted

Supplement manufacturers would have you believe that it’s too expensive to buy all the food it would take to get the nutrients supplied by their supplements. For one, healthy food isn’t expensive. For two, the sheer amount of nutrients in most of these supplements is unnecessary. For three, of course they say that, because they’re trying to sell you – gasp! – an ***expensive*** vitamin!

The myth of protein deficiency

http://www.gorillaprotein.com/protein_deficiency.html

10 myths about vegetarian diets busted

<http://healthyliving.msn.com/nutrition/10-myths-about-vegetarian-diets-busted>

The vitamin myth – why we think we need supplements

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/07/the-vitamin-myth-why-we-think-we-need-supplements/277947/>

10 myths about vitamin supplements

<http://www.doctoroz.com/videos/10-myths-about-vitamin-supplements>

Myth: Healthy Food Is Too Expensive

<http://www.obesitymyths.com/myth5.7.htm>

Fitness industry rant

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

I firmly believe that if the American public in general was self motivated, better educated about nutrition, and patient about working towards long term results, the fitness industry as we know it simply wouldn't exist.

Sadly, the industry takes advantage of a lack of self direction by offering cookie cutter routines in the form of dangerous fads such as Crossfit. It's better to have an approach to fitness, rather than one set routine. When you understand a system of exercise, you can use it to build your own individualized routines. Tailoring it to your current level prevents over training to injury, and will help you progress faster. Also, knowing how to design your own program and change things up keep it exciting – which help you stay self directed and motivated.

The industry also gets away with selling supplements to an uninformed public. There are many nutritional myths that continue to be propagated by the industry. ("You can't afford all the food you need to be healthy, but we'll sell you these insanely expensive supplements that humans somehow lived healthily without for thousands of years!")

The industry also touts all manner of get skinny quick, get six pack abs quick, and other such nonsensical diets and workouts. People want instant gratification, but nothing replaces the time tested principles of proper training, nutrition, and recovery. It's great to learn new things, but we have to understand the aforementioned principles so that we can make sense of the latest research and trends, and figure out what is useful. There are no secrets to getting skinny, strong, or healthy! Simply work hard, eat right, allow yourself to recover, and keep learning!

Martial Arts Industry Rant

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Before you read my long winded ranting, check out the below two pages for definitions of terms I use -

What a McDojo is and how it works - <http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/McDojo>

Bullshido at Urban Dictionary - <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bullshido>

There are many problems caused by the traditional martial arts community itself. For one, most traditional martial arts schools in America are “McDojo’s” or “Bullshido” schools, or both. This is usually because of underqualified instructors or outright conmen faking as instructors.

When I say under qualified, what I mean is that they have **no idea** how to teach what they say they do. Usually it’s more of a case of them not even knowing any better – they’re just passing it on as it was passed on to them. “This is just the way it’s supposed to be done.” No questioning. Tradition is important, but when you become a product of the style, rather than learning from it and keeping its traditions alive, while using some common sense – well, that’s just bad business. There is a balance that needs to be struck.

I knew a 4th degree black belt in some allegedly amazing style of karate who defeated easily in a street fight. I felt bad for the guy, certainly, and it was fortunate that there was a pair of guest instructors at his dojo who actually knew how to teach self defense. Still, seeing the quality of the karate instruction at the place, and the general lack of sparring, it’s no wonder. It’s dangerous to take something that has its roots in actual fights, and defang it, then pass it off as self defense. Or, you know, not even teach it as self defense – just as an art form. I’ve seen schools do both and it’s fraudulent. Oh, and unethical.

I read an article by a Black Belt magazine columnist where he said that if you want to learn self defense, you shouldn’t be putting on uniforms and bowing to people. Certainly, it isn’t necessary to wear a uniform to practice karate techniques, as a rule, but the insinuation is that karate should not be one’s first choice when it comes to self defense. It’s true that, in general, McDojo instructors have no idea whatsoever how to teach people to defend themselves. On the other hand, when taught properly, any of the major karate styles and many of their offshoots are quite useful. I don’t know where this notion of karate not being **at all** useful for self defense or combat came from. It seems to be widespread, and dojo’s aren’t helping it either.

http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Black_Belt_Magazine

The general public just sees it as something that kids take up when they’re little so they can learn discipline. Sorry, but that’s what the parents are for. Discipline starts at home. The dojo is not a daycare and shouldn’t be treated like one. But that’s a whole other rant. Still, my point is that, yes, while the money is in child classes, the kids still do need to learn self defense while they’re in your class. Anything less and it’s just a replacement for sports until the next actual sport starts up.

I hate seeing this kind of thing happen – they get treated as paychecks and not given anything worthwhile in return. Yes, there are the agility games, teamwork building exercises, and so forth at some karate schools, that are offered to kids. This just shouldn’t be at the expense of the actual karate program. Perhaps I’m just very conservative or old school that way. Who knows. The bills do have to get paid, but at some point a line has to be drawn.

Martial Arts Industry Rant, page 2

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

Anyway, two other major problems in most organizations are the forced belt testing fees (usually exorbitant, frequent, and time based) and the contracts. These are such horrid epidemics that I had to mention them even though they fall under “McDojo”. Honestly, you don’t want to be nickel and dimed anywhere else, or forced into a bunch of legalese.

The primary means of income **should** be the tuition, and belt testing fees just shouldn’t even exist. It’s completely unethical to charge people twice for what they already know. The tuition should cover the cost of the belts. That’s a belief of mine, though.

Anyway, elitism and pride in the form of “purism” are also major problems that lead to McDojo behavior and some outright Bullshido. No cross training is allowed in some organizations or it is heavily discouraged – with the excuse that doing so would deprive you of the time you need to improve upon what you’re learning from the organization. This makes some sense on the surface, but if you’re truly dedicated to the style, and another activity of yours doesn’t work at opposite ends, there’s no reason you can’t multitask. We all have 168 hours in the week, after all.

Still, another excuse used is that they don’t want you getting your style watered down by the others. Purity issues, mixing up the principles of the styles, etc. Style purists really grind my gears, but that’s a post for another day. Still, most of the time people spout this kind of thing, they’re usually almost acting like cult members and talk about how amazing the style is and **nothing else** is quite like it, therefore you shouldn’t cross train. These cult like atmospheres only exist in McDojo’s. Another sure sign is that what these types of places teach is essentially sport karate. (Sorry, but it is, and it’s a guarantee when you almost can’t walk safely in the dojo because of all the tournament trophies and medals stacked up.) Certainly, it’s important to spend time becoming proficient in the basics of a style before trying to branch out, but it’s also important to still cross train at some point.

I could write at length on all of these points, but that depends on whether any of my readers would be interested. Visit the original blog post for this rant if you’d like to discuss!

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/2014/03/08/martial-arts-industry-rant/>

Makeshift pullup bar setup – outside training area

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

My dad and I put up a pullup bar outside of one of the back windows at the studio. The bar can be used for hanging leg or knee raises, as well. This helps to complete a very “minimalist” outside training area! We already have a makiwara board hung up for striking practice. We already had cinder blocks for various lifts, as well as some old car tires for explosive training (throwing) and for striking with a sledgehammer. The tires can also be held by a partner for developing power in kicks and punches (just make sure you wear gloves). There are also a few bricks for use in pushup, handstand pushup, L-sit, and squat progressions. We can now get a tough, full body workout outside!

Oh, and the total cost of the project – \$0! We had the hooks, wood, foam, and duct tape already, and the pullup bar was a donation. We just hadn’t ever gotten around to putting it up anywhere until today.

Pictures -

http://owenjohnstonkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140310_180119_572.jpg

http://owenjohnstonkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140310_180014_272.jpg

http://owenjohnstonkarate.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/img_20140310_180014_2721.jpg

Fake super-sized muscles

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IILL-ibwOLA>

His look is unnatural, because his methods are...and then the steroids he admitted taking. His pursuit of perfection is way off. Instead, the body should be developed proportionately and in a symmetrical fashion in order to have optimal strength balances, as well as a better aesthetic. Rather than having artificially inflated muscles, he should have worked hard for them instead, and followed a proper diet for training. This would have guaranteed both strength **and** mass, in a more proportional and symmetrical way, all without the risk to his health.

Sports and Performance Martial Arts Rant

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

The sports culture draws people to the violent aspects of competition. Strength shouldn't be used to attack and destroy. The culture encourages all the trash talk and verbal bullying. The fans pay to watch this drivel! I can't understand the jock mentality or the "be a man" / "toughen up" sports culture in America. It doesn't promote the values and ethics of martial arts.

The performance martial arts such as in movies don't give the right impression of martial arts. It takes years of work and a lot of discipline to become proficient. People watch martial arts movies and are led to believe that you can master it in a few easy lessons if you meet a wacky stereotypical karate or kungfu master who spouts fortune cookie sayings with a thick Asian accent.

Honestly Bruce Lee, Karate Kid, and the ninja movie craze of the 80s guaranteed the rise of McDojo's and fraudulent masters everywhere. Sadly people are still buying snake oil from these types of con artists.

Also, "sports" is the national religion of America and it all revolves around greed. Corporatizing martial arts this way and through movies has ruined the public image of the arts.

I just have never understood sports culture, the win at all costs attitude towards competition, and such that are drilled from day one in the mainstream American education system. They permeate the nation's culture. They put people against each other instead of building bridges. Why can't we be future oriented and solving poverty, crime, and hunger rather than lining the pockets of corporations, athletes, and politicians? I suppose you could say I'm almost anti-everything when it comes to American culture in general.

Still, I'm an idealist to a fault. I believe in changing the world one life at a time and changing the culture from the ground up.

Nutrilies – a supplement rant

I recently left a fitness group because they kept trying to convince me to buy useless but very expensive Nutrilite supplements (sold by Amway). The reasoning they used was that you can't afford all of the food you need to be healthy. So uh, the solution is to buy the supplements so expensive that I can't afford them either? What? I eat pretty well and continuously make progress in my training, without detriment to my health. Also, humans were around and healthy for *thousands* of years before supplements. The whole "soil depletion" excuse that Amway spouts is another myth that the fitness group used in response to my reasoning against supplements. Apparently, they have a whole line of lies they use to sell supplements. Yep, Nutrilies. Don't get me wrong – supplements are *sometimes* needed, such as calcium tablets as you get older, or Vitamin B complex tablets for very active athletes. Still, besides those and similar examples, all of your nutrition *can* and *should* be gained from food.

Article – Married to an Ambot: Amway Products are a Good Reason Not to Get Involved with Amway

<http://marriedtoanambot.blogspot.com/2012/02/amway-products-are-good-reason-not-to.html>

Response to a sport martial arts article

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

What follows is my response to this article –

<http://thestickchick23.blogspot.com/2014/03/in-defense-of-sport-martial-arts.html>

The major problem with sport martial arts, especially the Asian flavors, is that they are so watered down from the original and effective traditions that it's a wonder there are **any** effective techniques in them for self defense. Sport karate and TKD are **especially** horrendous. You're taught to tap your partner with a clean shot that is very extended and easy for the judges to see, and then back off. Also, ground work and therefore, ground defense are not allowed at all (in general). All of these are just **terrible** habits to have.

Also, the techniques that **are** allowed are generally going to be dangerous to use, especially in TKD. It's like they **intentionally** do pretty much **everything** wrong for self defense. Head level kicks, but no leg kicks allowed? Wow. Multiple head level kicks without setting your foot down, spinning kicks, aerial kicks, etc. The punching skills are subpar and infrequently used.

Also, I have never seen any American style TKD practitioner actually use a substantial amount of blocking, parries, or useful kick evasions. Almost every single one I've watched literally only moves backward and forward in a straight line to dodge, which is **terrible**. Also, the kicks are **humongous** and easy to see coming. Combined with the hands being left down all the time, and the bouncing up and down on the feet in a light stance, and a lack of close-in fighting ability, and a lack of punching power, these make American style TKD just all wrong for self defense.

Most wrestling lacks submission work, but the structure and positional dominance are useful. Can be combined well with bare knuckle boxing for a fairly useful street self defense system. Sport boxing, not quite as much, but can be modified.

Judo – for self defense, a traditional Japanese Jiujitsu style or Aikido would be preferable, if you can only choose one. Aikido doesn't emphasize strength in any of the throws, while sport Judo does in some throws. The mechanics are different. Also if you look at older Japanese styles of Jiujitsu, the applications were **necessarily** battlefield oriented, therefore still effective for self defense.

Judo can still be modified, however, for self defense. The first thing is learning how to make it work when not in a gi. Looking at athletes such as Ronda Rousey will provide inspiration.

Fencing and shooting – you can't exactly carry weapons on the street except if you have a concealed weapons permit. Martial arts weapons, usually you can't get one. Not sure why, but hey, law is law. So these are no go. Yes, fencing can help with footwork, but since you can't exactly carry a sword around, you still need to train **specifically** for the situations you **would** find yourself in on the street or in a bar or wherever.

I'm not even getting into MMA except to point back to earlier points I made about boxing, muay Thai, and wrestling. Well, I'll also add, still, that Brazilian Jiujitsu is a sport style with some self defense leanings if you have the right instructor. MMA is a sport with rules, though, but fighting **on the ground** is a messy, dangerous affair for many reasons.

Response to a sport martial arts article, page 2

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

As to the 3 reasons you list for why sport martial arts are great for the rest of us...

1. The biggest problem here is that the wider culture is still clueless as to the value of the traditional arts, and generally has a very negative perception of it. That's a major reason why it's so hard to successfully market the traditional arts in America. People see the sport flavors and think that martial arts are violent, or that they're some kind of mystical Asian "woo", or that they're totally ineffective because of MMA and boxing.

Another problem is that when martial arts exploded in popularity in America as a result of Bruce Lee, a lot of con men took advantage of this and the fact that Americans a.) had little to no knowledge of martial arts before this (in general) and b.) need instant gratification. So, McDojo's became a trend. Sport martial arts and Hollywood have destroyed the perception of the traditional arts. They also quite often get in the way of valuable self defense skills actually being taught. This is mostly due to the Hollywood-ized combat sports influencing people interested in martial arts to learn "how to do UFC" or how to box or how to beat people up in the ring or cage in general. Therefore, it's bad business in general to **not** offer these things.

2. If you want to get into great shape, taking up martial arts isn't the optimal way to do it. Certainly, the conditioning routines used in combat sports are indeed very effective, but those routines are generally used as separate workouts. Training your body **for martial arts** is like training for any other athletic activity. You need to focus on improving kinesthetic awareness / proprioception, mobility / strength in ranges of motion, building strength in the muscles needed for your activity, injury proofing your body through proper and intense exercise, and improving your cardiovascular conditioning. Specifically focusing on strength and conditioning training is what helps with this, no matter the chosen athletic activity. Frankly, I wish I could convince more martial arts instructors to get certified in fitness instruction as well and offer that as an additional program.

3. I disagree with the gamification of martial arts because of the problems I mentioned above. A lot of people do think of martial arts as fun and that's fine. Whatever motivates them, right? But the problem with it just "being a game" is that when it ceases to be a game and the results or progress aren't coming, when it actually feels like the work that it is, most people get discouraged or straight out quit. I practice martial arts and train very hard in calisthenics because I love making progress, not because I find either one fun. It can still be very rewarding for me personally without it being just a silly game or sport.

Besides, all competition is driven by ego or greed anyway, and I have nothing to do with these as far as I can help it. Sport and competition don't make you a better person. I don't understand why **anyone** enjoys beating other people up in a cage or ring or backyard or wherever, or why anyone enjoys watching brutal, barbaric spectacles.

Her counter to my response -

<http://thestickchick23.blogspot.com/2014/03/my-counter-response-in-defense-of-sport.html>

To which I provided a final response over at a Google+ discussion thread here -

<https://plus.google.com/+OwenJohnstonKarate/posts/7ty2FhxYWFN>

Teaching at a gymnastics studio

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

I've been coaching strength and conditioning at a gymnastics studio in Moncks Corner, SC. The owner had been praying for a male instructor who could be a good role model for the boys under their care. I responded to a craigslist ad she posted, and admitted that I don't have a gymnastics background, but that I could help with general strength. We ended up on the phone about many possibilities and how I could be of service to her students.

So, I've been helping them out for a little over a week now. Even though I didn't expect to get sore while teaching there, I probably should have. I must have logged hundreds of total repetitions of dips, squats, handstand exercises, pushups, and pullups there, between Wednesday and Friday. Quite a few of those were done sloooowly in order to demonstrate the habits of proper form that I explained to each group, which is a workout itself!

One of the best things to come out of it is having to clearly think through and explain the smaller details of proper form in each exercise. I don't doubt that I benefit from this as much as they do. Teaching once is like learning twice! So, hopefully with more experience I'll get better at working with gymnasts.

All of the gymnasts I've worked with there are great students and great to get along with, as well! I've been teaching them ways to build strength and endurance in various positions and exercises – they've been very open to learning things that will improve their strength in gymnastics! I hope I get kept on as a coach at the studio :)

I also discovered the value of gym chalk at the gymnastics studio, as well. I don't know why it took so long for me to discover this, but better late than never! I ordered some from Amazon -

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0039PBS04/>

Do you live in Moncks Corner, Summerville, Goose Creek, or Charleston? Would you like to learn progressive calisthenics from me, or gymnastics and/or tumbling from the amazing team at Olympia Gymnastics? Head on over to this page for more information and to find out how to get in touch -

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com/2014/04/01/progressive-calisthenics-classes-moncks-corner-sc/>

Learning new gymnastics skills

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

So, I don't have a gymnastics background, but I've been coaching strength and conditioning at a gymnastics studio. I would still love to learn some of the awesome skills they practice! It's interesting that the "master step" of the bridge progression in Convict Conditioning comes across as a foundational exercise in movements such as the back handspring, in gymnastics. The master step I mentioned is called "stand to stand bridge" but it is known as the backbend in gymnastics. Yet, this does highlight the difference between progressive calisthenics (strength focus) and gymnastics (skill focus), while the two do share a common corpus of body weight training history. There's SO much more to learn! I hope to be able to learn the back handspring someday, because it looks really sweet! I found a good tutorial below, which I'll be trying to practice some along with the tips I got at the studio on Friday.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2f8nCfF5ig>

Do you live in Moncks Corner, Summerville, Goose Creek, or Charleston? Would you like to learn progressive calisthenics from me, or gymnastics and/or tumbling from the amazing team at Olympia Gymnastics? Head on over to this page for more information and to find out how to get in touch -

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com/2014/04/01/progressive-calisthenics-classes-moncks-corner-sc/>

Eclectic, hybrid, traditional styles

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

“I recently challenged my thoughts on mixed martial art schools. When do combined systems cease to be a muddle and start to be something new?”

Mixed up abomination – blog post by Katy Garden:

<http://maenosen.wordpress.com/2014/04/15/mixed-up-abomination/>

I’m fully with the author of the article on this line of thinking. Eclectic systems like Krav Maga have been shown to have some effective techniques and training methods. However, my preference is with the older, refined arts with a deeper focus on culture, discipline, and so forth. I’ve gravitated towards hybrid styles more as of late, which tend to keep the core traditions and the “nucleus” of one of the originating arts.

I suppose my question is similar to what the author asked. When does a combined system cease to be more like its “core style” and more of its own creation? I’m not saying there is a right or best answer to this. Aikido, Karate, and Judo are perfect examples of taking pre-existing styles and creating something new.

Eclectic styles that claim to be traditional or have traditional roots are still often a jumbled mess with no discernible nucleus, or core of guiding principles. However, that’s not to say they won’t develop such. Still, you can’t be all things to all people or try to do everything. Certainly, it’s true you can borrow from multiple grappling arts to supplement the striking portions of your art, but the question remains – what is the core methodology you build upon for grappling skills? In other words, there is a need for foundation. This is a matter of learning and internalizing the guiding principles. This is much like taking time to learn the techniques, then the mechanics, transitions, and general “feeling” and “theme” of each kata in a traditional karate style, then learning how to be “on autopilot” when performing – “become” the form. From there, you have the foundation, and you can “discard” the form. (Basically, the shu-ha-ri process of learning.) This is why I personally prefer traditional or hybrid styles, or even the occasional eclectic style that does have a solid focus on core principles.

As I implied before, there’s nothing wrong with eclectic arts in general. All arts, I believe, do have something to offer or at least have something you can learn from. Eclectic arts that go through that process of refinement – becoming very refined arts – end up with a core set of principles, in turn becoming traditional in a sense. Judo, Aikido, etc as you mentioned. I think on the opposite end – the other extreme – you have eclectic blends that seem rather hodge podge, almost seeming to have no thought process behind the combination of arts besides “this makes it more complete!”. As I stated, I see nothing wrong with eclectic arts in general, and specifically those that have at least had some thought and understanding put into them, but my personal preference is with hybrid arts or very refined arts (whether a result of an eclectic system or otherwise).

Eclectic, hybrid, traditional styles, page 2

<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com>

The style I teach is a hybrid style that I formulated with Heiwado karate and boxing (both sport boxing and bare knuckle) integrated into the core of the system, plus techniques and principles from Aikido, Brazilian JiuJitsu, and Judo. Heiwado itself was an eclectic karate style that eventually became more refined. The core of it is Wado ryu and Shotokan, with some principles and kata from Goju ryu and Shito ryu. So, you could say I'm also a firm believer in both methods of improvement – learning a core style as fully as possible, and cross training in other methods to find what could be improved and/or integrated.

Of course, we cannot forget the study of biomechanics. We all have the same basic human anatomy and fundamental movements to draw from. Not all styles acknowledge the fact that these fundamentals are accessible by all arts. It's an ego thing. I've seen some purists claim that Wado ryu Karate is so different from other ryu in its principles that it shouldn't even be considered a karate style. I don't see how it is even all that fundamentally different from other styles on a mechanical level. Certainly, the principles borrowed from Japanese JiuJitsu and Aikido did lead to the kihon waza and kata being practiced a bit differently than other styles, but maegeri is maegeri and kibatadachi is kibatadachi, regardless of stylistic differences.

There's certainly also no getting past the laws of physics. Still, we're all built differently and also, some styles just speak to each of us differently as well. While we cannot get away from fundamental movements, each style accesses more or less of these and in different ways according to the principles and philosophy of the style. Through learning a style, an artist learns how to genuinely express his or her own human body and those fundamental movements in his or her own way. Now that is style in another sense – as well as art!

So, while I do believe in the importance of styles, ultimately a style must become one's own personal style and outgrowth of his or her training. This doesn't mean I think everyone should form their own style. Of course not! If you love what you're doing, keep doing it :) And ultimately you will internalize it and express it naturally – it becomes yours to seek, find, and express as an art!

“Though they play an important role in the early stage, the techniques should not be too mechanical, complex or restrictive. If we cling blindly to them, we shall eventually become bound by their limitations.” —Bruce Lee

Minimalist training area - improvised gear

My outside karate / strength training area with improvised training equipment is basically complete. It is located behind my father's art studio and is very "minimalist". The only other pieces of equipment I would like in this area are a fully improvised uneven bars setup, a tractor tire (for flipping over), and a sledgehammer (for hitting tires with). Any other ideas are welcome and appreciated!

Minimalist training area so far:

Various cinder blocks, bricks, and old car tires

A pullup bar set up in a window

Wall mounted car tire makiwara board – read my post about this project:

<http://understandingkarate.com/2014/12/19/improvised-makiwara/>

Broomstick and old metal folding chairs that can be used with a pair of cinder blocks for a makeshift horizontal pullup bar (these are stored inside)

Total cost: \$0

I found the old cinder blocks and bricks scattered around the area. The car tires were given to me by auto repair shops. The pullup bar was donated to me, but one can be made from PVC pipe fairly easily. We had the other materials on hand already. My father's many dumpster diving adventures at a local thrift shop yielded quite a lot of stuff that's proven to be quite useful with just a bit of fixing!

Improvised makiwara (karate striking post)

Google Drive folder with pictures of this project -

Short URL: <http://goo.gl/8jpQ3M>

More about our “minimalist” training area with improvised gear -
<http://owenjohnstonkarate.com/2014/12/20/improvised-training-gear/>

We have put together a sturdier wall-mounted makiwara (striking board) that is also more resistant to water damage. It's fairly simple and straightforward project. It's also very cost effective, as the materials can often be found at thrift shops and home improvement stores. The old car tire that we mounted the board onto was given to me freely by a local auto repair shop. The tire provides a bit more “give”, allowing the user to deliver powerful blows without risk of injury to joints (as long as proper technique and caution are used). Auto repair shops will usually give you old car tires for free if you ask nicely, since they will often be throwing out old tires on a regular basis.

There are various types of makiwara that have historically been used in various karate styles. Makiwara are Okinawan in origin and traditionally consisted of a wooden board or pole padded with rice straw tied on with rope. Foam is an excellent alternative form of padding. Duct tape, leather, and canvas work quite well as coverings, and are quite durable. The makiwara can be free standing (via a pole placed in the ground or somehow attached to something heavy) or mounted to a wall in some way. The primary purposes of the makiwara are to condition one's striking tools and “kime”, which in the context of karate, means focus of technique.

If you use canvas, make sure you have enough to fold around the foam and around to the back of the board a few inches so that it can be stapled on.

Our materials and tools:

3 feet of plyboard cut into two pieces with power saw

Pieces of foam from old flotation devices, trimmed down to fit the board (to provide cushion)

Elmer's Glue and Shoe Goo to keep the foam in place and protect the board from water damage; Shoe Goo is sturdy enough to take a lot of beating

Heavy weights to help flatten out the foam

Painting canvas wrapped around the wood and attached via staples to provide a striking surface

Old car tire to mount the finished board on via bolts or screws

Wall to mount the tire on, using old wiring and screws

Improvised makiwara (karate striking post), page 2

We used quarter inch by two and a half inch bolts, washers, and locknuts to mount the board onto the tire. The locknuts won't work loose from vibration. The bolts go through the plywood and the tire. Then, you tighten the bolts to each other, with a locknut on either side of each bolt.

Makiwara is one of many tools used in "hojo undo", Japanese for "supplementary exercises". The term refers to training methods commonly used in traditional Okinawan karate. For a list of other tools, view my blog post:

<http://johnstonkarateclasses.com/2014/03/19/all-about-hojo-undo/>

I offer karate classes as well as many supplementary exercises. If you are interested, please get in touch –

owen@johnstonkarate.com

Improvised martial arts striking bag

Pictured below is an improvised martial arts striking bag. The bag came from an army surplus, and I filled it with sand. It provides incredible resistance for strikes, but still has some “give” to it, which means you won’t break a bone when using proper, controlled technique. For more information on improvised gear, check out my blog below -

<http://oddojecttraining.blogspot.com/>

Army surplus duffel bag – \$15

Sand, 200lbs – \$20

The looks I’ll get when punching it – priceless

https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB_A2VSW5g-eYot6VXpfbzFqRHc/preview

Protips:

Make sure you properly and gradually train your muscles and joints for rigorous work on any striking bag. Of equal importance is learning proper technique under a qualified instructor. This way, you will know how to safely strike the bag with correct form, and without injury.

Thirdly, protect your hands (MMA or karate gloves are suitable) until you have built up your power in striking the bag with proper technique. After that you may continue wearing hand protection if you wish, or strike the bag without it if you want to toughen up the hands.

Fourthly, if you want to toughen up your forearms and shins, strike the bag with your forearms (using blocking style techniques), and with round kicks. Of course, start slowly and gently at first with an eye on technique. It’s best to get the body used to the feeling of impact before going “all out”.

Lastly, always wrap up your session with some stretches, mobility work, and therapy for all of the muscles and joints that you trained. Therapy includes massage, heat, ice, post training muscle rub (something like “Icy Hot”[™]), and so forth.

Japanese concept of “ma”

The Japanese concept of MA (pronounced “maah”) refers to space, or negative space, or emptiness – it is essentially the void between all things. MA represents a lack of clutter and chaos. In Japanese martial ways, “ma-ai”, or the harmony of spaces – the distancing between two opponents (both physical and mental) – is very important. But it seems that these concepts are hard at first for non-Japanese to grasp, yet it does come with time. There are a lot of philosophical implications as well. Check out the article below as well as the video.

<https://wawaza.com/pages/when-less-is-more-the-concept-of-japanese-ma.html>

<http://youtu.be/VIoxgxCOf8E>

Partner glute ham raises

This video shows an excellent way to train the entire posterior chain, which so often gets neglected in martial arts training. The glutes and hamstrings are important in stances, explosive movements, and chambering kicks. Full bodyweight squats do train every muscle in the legs (and to a slight degree, the lower back, if posture is emphasized), but for those who feel a need to emphasize the glutes and hamstrings, this is an essential exercise!

<http://youtu.be/oa6Ai5ty6oY>

Nutrition rant

It kills me a little inside every time someone says that a particular food makes you fat or unhealthy. I don't consider "junk food" or any processed garbage to be food, so that leaves natural or organically made food. Real stuff. The reason I make this distinction is that no "real" food is fattening if taken in moderation, and it also depends on the individual's own body and goals. Eat what nature provides and you can't go wrong!

The primary reason that America is so obese is that we won't give up comfort foods and somehow think that because there's this thing called exercise that it'll be alright. Nothing like an American style diet to ruin every minute spent working out. Don't forget the excess amounts of soda, greasy burgers, and places like Krispy Kreme – then there's the holidays. Lastly, if you look at how much Americans spend on alcoholic beverages and tobacco products each year, that will truly put things into perspective as far as our national health crisis.

Look at it this way. Sodas are packed with empty calories – they have basically no nutritional value. Even the so called "fruit juices" on the market have added junk and aren't anywhere near as healthy as actually just eating a fruit.

<http://www.sugarstacks.com/beverages.htm>

These are even worse.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/14/sugary-beverages-calories_n_1595014.html

This discusses how the food industry basically undermines our health, and has some information on how long it takes to burn off the calories in soda. There is no denying that soft drinks and comfort foods have contributed to the obesity epidemic, and then there's all the chemicals in them, as well.

<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2014/06/06/23-minutes-thats-how-long-coke-says-you-need-to-work-out-to-burn-off-one-can/>

Drinking just one soda basically ruins your whole workout! Alcohol, soda, and junk foods have no place in your diet if you're trying to be healthy and trim down.

What to eat instead? There's no one size fits all, but a few good habits to follow are:

Shopping in the produce and meat sections of a local grocer (instead of buying boxed, canned, or junk foods)

Farmer's markets

If you do buy food that comes in a box or can, make sure it's all natural / organic – check the ingredients

Perhaps start your own garden

Nutrition rant, page 2

Make sure that, no matter the source of your fruits and vegetables, you get a variety of colors to ensure a variety of nutrients (especially fiber!)

Don't bother with restrictive diets; keep these in mind instead – if you need to lose weight, focus on nutrient dense foods that are either natural or organically made, and simply moderate your portions and ingredients according to your daily activity level. That's over-simplifying it, I know, and if you want one way to think about portions without feeling like your starving yourself or like you can't actually enjoy food, look into intermittent fasting. Again, there's no one size fits all, and there are many ways that one can go about it (fruit and veggie cleanse, soda fast, one day on / one day off fasting, and so forth).

Don't waste a single cent on supplements, unless you have an injury or medical condition that requires one or more. The fitness industry especially is quite guilty of aggressive and deceptive marketing when it comes to both supplements and useless gadgets. Of course they say that the supplements and gadgets are necessary, because they're the snake oil salesmen selling them! The best source of protein and other nutrients is, and always will be, real food. The closest thing to a supplement I use on a regular basis, personally, is the occasional energy shot (caffeine + B vitamins).

Mostly, listen to your body and how it reacts :)

Latest news at gymnastics (August 2014)

Things have been going marvelously well at Olympia Gymnastics. I recently became certified as a gymnastics coach and am learning more gymnastics skills from my fellow coaches, so I'll be able to help Olympia in more ways. Also, my highest ideal is to get all of the gymnasts to such a level of strength, that even my style of strength work (old school strength-calisthenics) will become skill work. Ultimately, I want to see if I can develop the pound-for-pound strongest gymnastics club in the state!

Lastly – to be quite honest – with as much of a loner as I tend to be, I'm surprised how attached I've gotten to some of the kids at gymnastics. It still takes me by surprise now and then. Does add a lot to what's already a fulfilling job, though. I'm still trying hard to not fall back into old emotional habits, though, but having such a positive, fulfilling place to be certainly helps!

Strength is health!

Natural, functional strength training, properly done without going into over training, is practically a wonder pill for injury prevention. It builds longevity and vigor into basically every system of the body. The trifecta of a proper lifestyle (sleep, managing emotions etc.), proper nutrition, and proper training is the closest thing to a fountain of youth I can think of!

PCC workshop experience (July 2014)

I attended the most recent progressive calisthenics instructor certification workshop, which took place in Alexandria, VA. I passed what is called the Century Test, and it was exhilarating! All of the other candidates passed as well. The entire testing period like one long 80s style training montage (sans the rock music of course). I'll describe the experience in another post!

If you want to know more about these workshops, go here -

<http://pccblog.dragondoor.com/>

I met John DuCane (founder of Dragon Door) at the workshop on Friday. He is one of the nicest guys I've ever met and also one of the most knowledgeable. I can't say enough good about how amazing this workshop was. The Kavadlo brothers are by far the best instructors I've ever worked with and can pull off some crazy bodyweight strength skills. Best of all, they're really cool dudes. I'm thrilled to be a part of their growing team of instructors!

More on the next page

PCC workshop experience, page 2

Here are some things that I picked up at the workshop that I'll be working on.

- *Intense focus on body alignment, partner cues, and full body tension
- *Hollow body drill to assist alignment (partner cues lower back – raise knees to make easier)
- *Archer pushups – shift the center of gravity over to the working arm and stretch out the non-working arm, which will assist in the exercise, then shift over to the non-working arm to practice the exercise on that side
- *Self assisted one arm pushups – make a fist with the other hand and place it vertically on floor where it can help push out of the bottom position
- *Scapular retraction from dead hang on the pullup bar
- *Partner assistance for two leg squats with cues for the hips and knees (ankles should flex during the squat, meaning the shins will not remain straight)
- *Clutch flag – requires a high degree of body awareness, tension, and awareness of leverage. It requires a lot of technical execution, as well, so when I have time, I'll find a video tutorial that covers it and share it.
- *Pistols (basically one leg squats) with lessened range of motion by putting table, chair or box behind you
- *Arms in front to counter balance hips naturally going back slightly – keep hands open if desired or clasp hands very tightly to generate tension for the technique
- *Easier version – Stand on box or chair with working leg so that non working leg doesn't have to stretch as much in the bottom position
- *Shrimp squats – hold the non working foot in the same side hand and squat until that knee is touching the floor, just behind the heel of the working leg
- *Head bridges help open up the thoracic spine
- *Partner can help you get deeper into a full bridge by gently pulling your shoulders when you are in position
- *Partner can help you build strength in bridging or test stability by giving downward push into lower abdomen – tell them “less” or “more” depending on your level and how you feel
- *Say “when” or another agreed upon safe word, once you feel like you have had resistance long enough
- *Crazy bridging feat – build up to having a partner stand on your abdomen while you hold a bridge
- *Raised elbow lever – also very technical, so I'll find a tutorial to post for this one as well
- *Partner assisted tripod headstand – he or she should spot you by your ankles or feet, and straighten your legs upwards and get them in the same line as your shoulders, as they continue to spot you while verbally correcting your technique. Your partner should also cue you to keep pressing through your hands, if needed, as you extend.
- *Variation – get into the start position of the tripod headstand, slowly extend one out to the front of your body, and then the other. From here, extend the feet as described before. This variation emphasizes the shoulders more than the triceps. Some trainees will find this easier while others find this harder. Play around with them! :)

PCC workshop experience, page 3

The Century Test consists of 100 total reps:

40 squats

30 pushups

20 hanging knee raises

10 pullups

Lastly, I should have expected to be sore after such an amazing calisthenics workshop, but wow! My upper back was sore as a result of the 10 strict dead hang pullups at the end. It's surprising because I've been working pullups hard. It shouldn't surprise me though because I usually prefer to keep my hands closer than I did and to use an underhand grip. Also, I found out that I tend to keep my elbows a little too bent in the bottom position, and as a result I'm not giving work to the lats in the upper range of their motion. It is also considered incorrect for the Century Test. Being reminded repeatedly to lock out the elbows at the bottom helped me start breaking the habit.

Recent workouts - November 26th, 2014

Below are two of my recent workouts.

November 17th, 2014

“Street workout” at a public park

Dragon flags on park benches

Clutch flags using small trees

Jumping up to wood rafters for pullups

Various lifts using park benches as resistance

“Box jumps” onto the benches

Holding an L-sit between two benches

One arm pushups

Shadow boxing

Handstand pushups

One arm Australian pullups and Archer Australian pullups from hand rails

Jump front support and “single bar dips” on hand rails

November 24th, 2014

Chest, shoulders, and triceps

Incline pushups, 2×20

Jowett pushups, 2×15

Handstand pushups, 3×8

Pike position handstand pushups (feet elevated for added difficulty), 3×10

Jowetts with 30 pound sandbag on back – 1×12, 1×10

Bodyweight triceps extensions – 1×10, 1×8

Above with 30 pound sandbag on back – 2×8

Parallel bar dips – 2×10

Above with same sandbag – 2×8

Neck, gut, and grip work

Wrestler's bridge – 2×10

Front bridge – 2×10

Decline situps on exercise bench while holding a 25 pound weight plate – 2×20

Half get ups with 30 pound sandbag – 1×10 each side

Dragon flag negatives into holds – 4x

Two arm towel hang – 30 seconds

Thick bar hang (towel around pullup bar) with two hands – 2×30 seconds

Descriptions for a few of the exercises

Jowett pushups – place two sturdy chairs in front of you, facing each other, and a chair behind you, facing your back. Next, face the pair of chairs and place one hand on each, and lock your arms out, then carefully place one foot at a time on the chair behind you. You'll do very deep pushups from here – try to visualize getting your chest stretched past the chairs, then push back up. Build up to doing this for 3-5 sets of 12-15 or 2-3 sets of 15-20. For a special challenge, add a weight vest, a sandbag in a backpack, or a partner pressing down slightly on your shoulders.

Bodyweight triceps extensions, also known as tiger bend pushups – [Bodyweight extension tutorial](#)

If you're having difficulty with handstand pushups, check out the progression in my Street Workouts article, which also includes tutorial video playlists.

[Street Workouts – Minimalist Training, Anywhere](#)